

REGION 5 SCADC – Planning Meeting 1

November 16, 2010

Pike County Center for Economic Development, Troy, AL

1:00 pm

ConnectingALABAMA Executive Director **Jessica Dent** began meeting and introduced ground rules. Also gave brief intro of our initiative for a few attendees who were not present at the Kickoff Meeting. Statewide Coordinator **Nichole D’Andrea** continued the meeting introduction by presenting the need for a comprehensive plan in order to be able to capitalize on opportunities as they present themselves.

Nichole asked for introductions:

Mary Brooks – Bullock County – Family Preservation Agency

Alexis Smith – Bullock County – BC School District Technology Coordinator

John Fischer – Bullock County – Union Springs Telephone Company

Ray Wasden – Butler County – Troy Cable

Allen Phillips – Crenshaw County – Gibson & Carden

Kara Barker – Bullock County – Bullock County Development Authority

Jim Perdue – Crenshaw County – Probate Judge

Jimmy Copeland – Pike County – Troy Cable (Talked about AT&T and CenturyLink Territory, but went into their grant and how it will help develop broadband availability in rural areas).

George Tab – Bullock County – Extension Agency

John Pulliam – Macon County – Extension Agency

Nichole passed out note cards and explained that names were optional but asked 3 questions:

- 1) why here did you attend this meeting**
- 2) what do you think is important about broadband**
- 3) what are the broadband issues in your region**

Jimmy Copeland: Why? To hear everyone else’s story. Get a better picture of what other counties are doing, and to share ideas. Biggest Issues: How to drive into rural areas, and interconnection with other providers. The following question was posed: How is communication between providers? Dothan & MGY are regional hubs, so Pike County has to figure out how to get from Troy to MGY & Dothan. How do regulations affect companies? (John Fischer): Much harder to work with big boys. (A statement met with agreement from Jimmy Copeland & Ray Wasden).

Judge Jim Perdue: Crenshaw County lacking in many areas, so very much want to improve the quality of life. Hooking up substations is very important, and important for students to teach older generations. We have to capitalize on opportunity. If you build it, they will come. Biggest issue is communication between providers, and getting to currently unserved areas.

Kara Barker: Children and education are biggest issue. Parental involvement is lacking. Children are learning at top of the line labs at school, but little connectivity in home limits the children.

George Tabb: Why? Extension service will include broadband education services, so we will develop educational programs and organize community. Why important? Economic development is vital. Also improving quality of life is number 1 goal. Accessibility is major issue. We have to make the connection of tying the cost to the benefits. Uses technology for work, but will learn to do what is necessary.

Jessica gave a brief summary of our Auburn/A&M County Extension SBA Grant.

Allen Phillips: From a business standpoint, filing is becoming REQUIRED for online rather than optional. Firms supporting more and more clients remotely. Only works if both sides have good connection. Can work from home as much as from office. Biggest issue is having reliable affordable connections for businesses. Big gap between Mom & Pop and Big Boys.

John Pulliam: Macon County Extension. Providing equal opportunities for all. Affordability is key issue. Involvement leads to more involvement. Education and application is important.

Ray Wasden: As service provider, they want to improve customer service. Helps develop business going forward. Internet's role in everyday life is large and is still growing. Availability and connectivity is biggest issue. Butler County issues? Availability. Former providers weren't able to keep up with demand. Why? Funds held company back. **(Jimmy Copeland)** Conventional banking gives no value to middle mile fiber, so banks are very hesitant on telephone and cable companies. RUS funding available, but lots of red tape. **(Jimmy Copeland)** No incentives for ISP's to build out as if they were actually building buildings. **(Jim Perdue)** In economic development situations, the 1st business to commit gets incentive.

John Fischer: Glad to see AL broadband initiative. Education is the key. Educating the public is essential, because younger generation is learning at school. Biggest concern is that wireless will take away business. Have 11 cell towers in area, and soon customers will have options, so must stay competitive.

Alexis Smith: Education is biggest concern. Connectivity is essential at home in order to bridge the gap. That requires educating parents, not the students. Digital natives is key term. Adults see that employment and healthcare are ways to make that important to them. STI Information now. Grades, discipline referrals, notes home. Email parents the report cards. She has the ear of the parents right now, so she is able to build the demand from the parent's standpoint. Rec Center can basically become PCC for training. Students won't come home if parents don't have connection. **(Jim Perdue):** Once these kids (who are much more digitally capable) become parents, the introductory education becomes less important. **(John Fischer):** Programming rates for cable companies are going crazy. Disney owns ABC. TV is getting more expensive and less relevant. **(Jimmy Copeland):** Population needs to be aware that what used to be free (to the cable companies) is no longer free. These fees are costing cable companies tons of money.

(John Fischer): Big 4 (ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX) is driving cost of re-transmission up and therefore hurting the smaller companies.

Alexis Smith: Skype connected a Mom in Afghanistan to her child in Bullock County. This technology is amazing, and we have to make it available.

Mary Brooks: Bridging inter-generational gap is the biggest obstacle. Accessibility, affordability are biggest issues. Attended meeting because of a need. Children are #1 priority. Doesn't want Bullock County to get left behind. Wants to be included.

Jessica talked about how partnerships were the reason that Alabama was able to receive funding for projects in Round 2 of the BTOP grants.

Nichole reiterated the need to show that the benefits outweigh the costs.

Alexis Smith: Maps and coverage? **(John Fischer):** Report monthly, but not shown on (ConnectingALABAMA) maps. Also, all dial-up customers don't necessarily want high speed access.

The group addressed the need to consolidate mapping effort. **(Jimmy Copeland):** Until demand is great enough, AT&T not going to put the electronics in place needed.

Jimmy Copeland: Mary brought up valid point, but meetings need to include senior center efforts. Community Action agencies need to be present as well. Medical aspect needs to be included as well. Public safety also should be. Telemedicine will help rural Alabama more than we realize.

The following are written comments from the notecards handed out at the beginning of the meeting:

- Remote Client Support through broadband is essential for small businesses
- Affordability and Reliability are biggest factors
- We live by the internet: anything you need, just Google it
- Broadband is important for parental involvement and internet safety along with a learning curve, but can bring families together
- Want to ensure all students obtain connectivity for educational purposes, especially those attending college for collaboration purposes.
- I came to this meeting to obtain info about how Bullock County and its citizens will be incorporated into the Region's Plan and to be a voice for rural families and children.
- Want to improve Macon County in the business area and home use.
- Broadband connectivity is essential in order to have the community grow with technology.

Nichole recapped the meeting as Jessica wrapped up meeting. She re-emphasized the need for representation from all different sectors. Alexis pointed out the generation gap, and the need for progress in these areas. The meeting drew to a close, and attendees and others on contact lists

will be kept informed about when the next Planning Meeting will be held to begin defining the priorities discussed at this first Planning Meeting.